

Malcolm Turnbull blames 'radical Islamist ideology' for terrorism

Paul Maley, David Crowe, The Australian, 12:00AM June 17, 2016



Malcolm Turnbull with Susan Carland, left, and youth advocate Yassmin Abdel-Magied at Kirribilli House last night. Picture: Andrew Meares



Malcolm Turnbull with Susan Carland, left, and youth advocate Yassmin Abdel-Magied at Kirribilli House last night. Picture: Andrew Meares

Malcolm Turnbull has sought to dramatically toughen his language around national security, blaming "radical Islamist ideology" for the overwhelming majority of the world's terrorist violence.

As Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton endure mounting criticism over their refusal to acknowledge the role of radical Islam in this week's Orlando terror shooting, and with Mr Turnbull's credentials in the area still considered suspect by some in his own party, the Prime Minister has waded headlong into the debate around language and terror.

On the same day he became the first prime minister to host an interfaith Iftar (fast breaking) dinner in Ramadan, the Muslim holy month, Mr Turnbull told The Australian there was no question from where the majority of the world's terrorist violence emanated. "In this age of terrorism — overwhelmingly inspired by radical Islamist ideology — our security agencies must have the trust of Islamic communities in order to succeed," Mr Turnbull said. "This is why I choose my language carefully."

Striking a comparison with border security, which the government has long maintained is essential for ensuring public faith in the migration program, Mr Turnbull said the same principles applied to counter-terrorism. "Our security agencies rely on public trust to keep our country safe," he said. "Old-fashioned human intelligence is becoming more important as encryption technology enables terrorists and sympathisers to 'go dark' with their electronic networks."



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To those at the celebration dinner last night, Mr Turnbull said: "Australians are not defined by religion or race; we are defined by a commitment to common political values, democracy, freedom, the rule of law, all underpinned of course by mutual respect."

After he seized the prime ministership from Tony Abbott in September, Mr Turnbull immediately toned down the language used to describe domestic terrorism, a move seen as a tacit rebuke to Mr Abbott, who had favoured more muscular language to describe the threat posed by Islamic State. Relying heavily on the advice of security agencies such as ASIO, who argued that terms such as "death cult", a phrase favoured by Mr Abbott, impeded co-operation with the Muslim community, Mr Turnbull instead favoured more neutral terms and avoided emphasising the central role of Islam in terrorist violence. The shift led to him receiving heavy criticism, particularly from the right wing of the Liberal Party. The issue flared after it was revealed Mr Turnbull had encouraged ASIO boss Duncan Lewis to phone a small number of Coalition MPs who remained wedded to such terms.

Yesterday, Mr Turnbull defended his language, saying that just as the goal of terrorist groups was division, the best weapon against them was unity. "We must not tag all Muslims or their religion with responsibility for the crimes of a tiny terrorist minority — which is precisely what the extremists want us to do," the Prime Minister said. "This does not mean we sit back and do nothing. To the contrary, we continue to reform our national security laws to give our agencies the powers they need in this ever-evolving security and technological environment."

Mr Turnbull repeated a similar message to a gathering of Muslim, Jewish and Christian leaders as well as prominent Islamic Australians including AFL Richmond footballer Bachar Houli, who led the recitation before the meal, and Network Ten host Waleed Aly and his wife Susan Carland, a lecturer at Monash University, at Kirribilli House in Sydney last night.

Mr Turnbull acknowledged the threats of terrorism and violence, while praising the Islamic community as an integral part of the nation.

He said the fight against terror would not be won solely through the “narrow security prism” . “Acts of terror like Sunday’s massacre in Orlando are perpetrated to divide us along lines of race, religion, sect and sexuality,” Mr Turnbull told the group.

“But that kind of hatred and division must not prevail. We must stand together like we do tonight as one Australian family united against terrorism, racism, discrimination and violence.”

The Prime Minister was introduced at the dinner by the deputy chair of SBS and executive director of the Australian Multicultural Foundation, Hass Dellal, a key adviser in government efforts to counter radicalisation.

Mr Turnbull said he had seen first-hand the “devotion, patriotism and dedication” of young Muslim leaders in Australia who continued to “uplift this nation” through the virtues of their faith. In a short speech he made no reference to Islamic terrorism amid a furious global debate about how to “label” the perpetrator of the Orlando killings, Omar Mateen.

Mr Turnbull singled out young Muslim leaders he had met in the past, such as Azmeena Hussain, a senior associate at a Melbourne law firm and campaigner against domestic violence. “I want to reiterate something that I said to the Islamic Council of Victoria in March ... you are an integral part of an Australian family that rests on the essential foundation of mutual respect and understanding,” he said.